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Debate starts today on jobs for Redstone

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City leaders confident panel will approve Pentagon plan

Huntsville leaders will be watching closely today as the Base Realignment and Closure Commission begins four days of deliberations over the Pentagon's proposed changes to military and civilian work.

Hearings are scheduled to begin at 7 a.m. CDT at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City in Arlington, Va. The sessions will be broadcast live on C-SPAN2.

Army decisions, including some affecting Redstone Arsenal, could be made by the BRAC panel today, according to the commission agenda, but the deliberations probably won't stick to a specified timetable.

"It's a fluid schedule. It could happen anywhere between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.," said Jay Snyder, a BRAC consultant for the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce.

Joe Ritch, co-chairman of the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee, informed chamber officials in an e-mail late Tuesday that all Army decisions affecting Redstone, including missile defense work, are likely to be taken up by the BRAC panel today.

"If that is the case, all of our issues should be resolved (today)," Ritch wrote.

The Pentagon has recommended that the headquarters of the Army Materiel Command and the Space & Missile Defense Command move to Redstone, along with the bulk of the Missile Defense Agency's work. All of those commands are based near Washington, D.C., where high rent and questionable security pose problems for the Pentagon.

Should BRAC stay with the Pentagon's recommendations, and President Bush and Congress approve them, the moves could bring anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000 jobs to the area, depending on how many contractors follow the government work.

Huntsville leaders were confident Monday during a $100,000 check presentation ceremony to the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee that the recommendations to move work to Huntsville would stand.

"Of course, anything could happen," said Mike Ward, governmental affairs liaison for the chamber. "I've not seen anything that would suggest that something negative is going to come out" of the commission's debate.

To help lure work here, the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee has spent about $700,000 on lobbyists, advertising and other activities geared at trumpeting Redstone to Congress, Pentagon and BRAC officials.

BRAC has been the top priority for area economic leaders in recent months, said Dave Hargrove, incoming chamber chairman.